

## **Testimony from I DRIVE SAFELY – Rick Hernandez, Managing Director**

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee - Good morning and thank you for allowing me the opportunity to testify today in support of House Bill 4723. My name is Rick Hernandez, and I am the founder and Managing Director of I DRIVE SAFELY (IDS.) IDS is an established provider of research-based driver education and safety programs, offering online training solutions throughout North America. Since 1998, we have graduated over 5 million students, including nearly 30,000 graduates of our Michigan Basic Driver Improvement Program.

Today, as you consider the merits of House Bill 4723, as it relates to expanding program eligibility beyond a once in a lifetime benefit, I would bring to your attention a recent study conducted by the Ministry of Transportation of Ontario (MTO.) In 2012, the MTO commissioned a study (the Human Factors North Study of July 2012) to examine its demerit point system and the effectiveness of specific interventions. The study found that while a demerit point system is an effective means of modifying driver behavior, better results can be realized by combining a demerit point system with early and frequent interventions. The study examined the use of warning letters at each of the different levels of point accumulation, and suggests the use of a warning letter, in conjunction with a driver improvement program, would be more effective than a system that relies on demerit points alone. This is further support by the use of sanction and remediation programs in other provinces, U.S. states, Europe, Australia and New Zealand.

As required in the current law, the curriculum of every provider offering a basic driver improvement course in Michigan has proven to be effective in reducing collisions and violations, thus improving overall driver behavior. As outlined in the Ontario study, early and frequent

intervention leads to improved outcomes. Limiting effective intervention to those who have not accumulated demerit points, and further limiting the opportunity to a once in a lifetime benefit, is counterintuitive, self-defeating, and fails to address the risky behavior and unsafe attitudes of those drivers who need intervention the most.

I ask each of the members of this committee to recall the last time you participated in any formal driver education or driver safety training. Like most Michigan motorists, driver education starts and ends with the pre-licensing course associated with receiving your initial driver permit. However, each year new laws are passed which affect every licensed driver. New vehicle and safety technologies are developed which affect the way we drive. In addition, and perhaps the most prolific change of all, is the ongoing evolution of how we communicate and socialize. The cell phone has introduced challenges to road safety, the likes of which compare to driving under the influence. Talking, texting and even web browsing while driving have rapidly become the most common of all risky driving behaviors, for which new laws, enforcement, and penalties are alone not enough. A basic driver improvement course is a proven vehicle for the dissemination of vital safety information. It is an opportunity to inform, re-educate and modify unsafe driving behavior. No public service commercial or safety brochure can measure up to the effectiveness of a 6 hour captive driver improvement program. The expansion of this program will allow Michigan motorists to refresh their knowledge and understanding of critical safety information throughout their driving career, which can save lives and create safer Michigan roadways.

While the proposed amendment to the current law would expand the reach of the driver improvement program, it would not be a get out of jail free card for habitual offenders. The proposed three year eligibility period requires participants to demonstrate a behavioral change, considering any subsequent offence would result in the assessment of demerit points. I would

point out to the committee that out of approximately 30 states where driver improvement programs have been implemented, the eligibility period ranges from once in 12 months, to once in 3 years. There is no other state that limits participation based on demerit point accumulation, or to a once in a lifetime benefit.

In conclusion, this measure, if passed, will have an immediate benefit to the taxpayer. Minor offenders will be able to reduce the likelihood of rising insurance rates while mitigating the number of demerit points added to their record. This will reduce foot traffic and congestion at the court houses by redirecting these individuals to (re)education programs. Enhancing the current demerit point system by increasing the availability and frequency of effective interventions, will have positive impact on roadway safety, while mitigating the society costs of traffic collisions. As an established, self-funded program, this measure calls for nothing more than your support, to positively impact public safety and help reduce the devastating societal costs of risky driving behaviors.